

Hearings on Religious Persecution in Sudan: Mr. Roger Winter Oral Testimony

February 15, 2000

(Note: These are unedited and uncorrected transcripts)

MR. WINTER: Thank you very much, and thank you for having me.

I am just back from Sudan about 2-1/2 weeks ago, from the Eastern Front. We don't usually talk much about the Eastern Front. It is the front off of Eritrea and part of Ethiopia. It is probably the most strategic front because it covers the area closest to Khartoum and the area that is sort of in a position to affect the corridor between Port Sudan and Khartoum.

I should also say that there is no humanitarian assistance to any civilians in any part of the Eastern Front whatsoever.

All Sudanese are suffering from this war--all Sudanese. This is not a Christian versus Muslim war, and I think that that is probably very clear, but I want to return to that before I conclude.

The point of being on the Eastern Front was to specifically take a look at how Muslims who are in opposition to this Government are faring. And as I indicated, civilians receive no assistance up there whatsoever. There is an interesting phenomenon there called the Unified Military Command. The Unified Military Command is a place where Muslims and Christians and neither fight together against the Government. It is a location where you have the Beja Congress--the Beja are a Muslim people--and the SPLA and the Sudan Alliance Forces and the DUP and other elements of the NDA all fighting together against this Government. So this is a broad constituency against the Government.

I want to focus on my Government. The U.S., despite the fact that you heard from Dick McCall, has an ineffective and incoherent policy on Sudan and has had for the last 7 years. Dick McCall is the administration's best foot forward. He really cares about Sudan. But you should not view him as the picture of the administration's approach here.

When this administration came in, George Moose [ph.] was the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa. At the first hearing we had on Sudan, Mr. Moose indicated that U.S. policy on Sudan was under review. It has been under review for the last 7 years. We are still not very coherent and still not particularly effective. Part of that is because the administration is divided, and it is divided despite the fact that Sudan is the most marketable humanitarian tragedy in the world. There is no question about this. We have a unified Congress in most aspects when it comes to Sudan. It doesn't make any difference if you are conservative or liberal, Republican or Democrat--you know what the equities are in the conflict in Sudan. You know the Government is the primary abuser, and you know the South is the primary victim.

And it is also very clear, I can tell you, for American people. When they hear the story of Sudan--and increasingly, they are--they make up their minds very clearly where the equities are. So with a unified public on this issue when they understand it and a unified Congress, it is amazing that our administration is as divided as it is.

What we have had is the worst conceivable approach over the last 7 years. We have had no real priority on Sudan. We have had a situation in which we engage in very hostile rhetoric because of Sudan's international terrorism involvements, but really no practical way of confronting the Government that is sponsoring international terrorism or that is producing the massive body count.

We have a massive humanitarian program, and that is a very good thing, but what it has done is sort of mask the fact that we don't have a very coherent political approach. The net result has been, as some have indicated earlier, that Khartoum has been able to play the victim, particularly in the Middle East; it has generated for itself by playing that role massive assistance, and the war itself has gone on.

Millard Burr, who some of you know is the best analyst of the statistics with respect to conflict in Sudan, will tell you that perhaps during this current administration, as many as 800,000 Sudanese have lost their lives. This is a huge number. This is a number that demands some attention from our Government at the highest level. It demands attention toward ending the war in a just fashion and other kinds of strategies. But we haven't had a particularly effective approach.

In December 1997, the then new Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, visited Kampala and met with the opposition to this Government. It is unheard of for a sitting Secretary

of State to meet with the rebel armed opposition of a government with whom we have diplomatic relations. That happened again just a few months ago. You would think that that was a symbol of a very grand strategy of identifying with the opposition and against the government. Yet we find perhaps a figment of identification with the opposition, but in fact no practical program, and we have not heard a word about Sudan from President Clinton.

I'm going to propose something very controversial, and it is very personal to me because I have traveled a journey to get to this position. But I believe it is important for the United States to support the opposition to this Government in Khartoum, and we need to do it even if we have to go it alone.

Why do I say that? The objective is a just peace. That's what we all want. But it is very clear if you follow Sudan--you have got to understand that the National Islamic Front Government, which is an extremist government, believes that it can win the war. And as long as it believes it can win the war and win it without dealing with the justice issues that caused the war, they are not prepared to negotiate in any serious way.

They believe that you are going to lose your attention to Sudan just like the American Government and the outside world does, and if they can survive over time, you are going to discount the fact that large numbers of Africans are dying, because after all, Sudan is of limited strategic value to us.

They believe they have momentum. They haven't been really seriously attacked militarily lately. Yes, the opposition is intact, but they are the poorest rebel group I've ever seen in my life, and in the last 20 years, I have had involvements with almost all of them because this is where refugees come from is this kind of conflict. And I can tell you that this is a poor rebel group. This is a rebel group who fails in a military initiative because three drums of petrol don't get through. That's what makes or breaks things here.

So the Government thinks it has momentum. The oil in particular is giving it a sense of momentum. The conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which has siphoned off some of their front-line states' opposition, has given them some momentum. The fact of the European connivance--it's almost as if some of the European countries have flared nostrils with the scent of oil that is increasingly becoming available in Sudan, and they want their piece of it--has really brought Khartoum to a place where it thinks it is on a roll, and they don't need to negotiate. They almost expect us if they can survive to go away, and they will at some time in the future present us--as the inter-Hamway [ph.] types in Rwanda tried to do a little while ago--with a fait accompli. They thought they could eliminate everybody, and this Government thinks that it can deliver on its agenda also while the world dithers, while it arms its friends, in the waning days of our administration, while we are all here

preoccupied with elections. It believes that it can ultimately deal with the churches, that it can deal with the moderate Muslim elements, that they will be snuffed out one at a time, and that they can overwhelm their adversaries.

It is only if we disabuse them of that idea that there is any opportunity for real negotiations. There ultimately has to be the grand political deal between the parties in Sudan, between the contestants in Sudan.

My believe is that what we have seen in the last several years is all the initiative on Sudan coming from the Congress. We haven't really seen much in terms of creative initiative from the administration.

I think the Congress' recommendation that we provide assistance to the opposition was flawed in its particulars but is the right course of action. Those forces, those NDA forces, do represent the democratic elements within Sudanese society. As a matter of fact, you must keep in mind that the NIF overturned a Government that was democratically elected. They overturned the Government for the very purpose of aborting a peace process. So you have to take their orientation into account.

The material assistance to the opposition is the key. Yes, we have to provide diplomatic support for the NDA. Yes, we have to try to maintain their unity. Yes, we have to provide American leadership in the UN, try to get a no-fly zone--I don't think China is going to go with it--but try it. Yes, we have to try to condemn them at the Security Council every time they do one of these bombings. Yes, we have to present an initiative on self-determination--again, China is going to say no; they don't want to raise the issue of Tibet--but we should still do it, because it's the right thing, because the equities are clear.

And
frankly, we need Bill Clinton to help us do this. I think that if this Commission continues to highlight Sudan and continues to take the strong stand that you have done, you represent our best shot at having the word "Sudan" spoken by our President.

Thank you very much.